



## PUMA: Solidarity Economy in Pumarejo, Spain

**Highlights** The Community Exchange Scheme in the Pumarejo neighbourhood of Seville is one of many examples of solidarity economies rooted in alternative forms of exchange. Based on an alternative social currency, the Puma, the scheme supports collective decision-making, localised consumption, and the redeployment of under-utilised skills and competencies. Since no interest is paid on 'Pumas', the system encourages exchange rather than accumulation and wealth maximisation.

### Introduction

The Palace of Pumarejo, located in the Spanish city of Seville, the home of the family of Count Pedro Pumarejo until 1785, was converted into housing and shops in the early twentieth century that serviced the surrounding neighbourhood of El Pumarejo. However, by the 1990s, the once grand palace had deteriorated due to landlord and municipal neglect. The situation worsened when a hotel company bought 50% of the property, causing worry over potential eviction for the families who lived in the building and local shop owners.

In response to the threat of gentrification, in 2000 a group organised into the la Plataforma por la defensa de la Casa-Pumarejo (The Neighbours Association in Defence of Pumarejo Palace (NADPP)). In 2003 they succeeded in winning legal protection for the building when it was declared a BIC (Bien de Interés Cultural – a site of historical and cultural heritage). However, the difficulties of Pumarejo did not end there. The



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neighbourhood of Pumarejo continued to suffer from stigmatisation as a dangerous area due to poverty, homelessness, and prostitution. Processes of gentrification and property speculation also continued, which led to many poorer residents being expelled from the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the economic crisis of 2008 had a particular effect on Pumarejo's inhabitants, when many residents lost jobs and faced deeper social and economic exclusion.

### Timeline

1990s	2000	2003	2008	2009	2012	2017
Property speculation and processes of gentrification threaten the neighborhood of El Pumarejo	NADPP is founded	Casa del Pumarejo is declared a BIC	Global financial crisis puts more economic stress on the neighborhood	Local government purchases Casa del Pumarejo and De-growth Seville network launched	Launch of Puma social currency	Transition from paper currency to digital, with the use of the Clickoin app

### How It Works

In response to this growing financial exclusion and loss of community wealth, a movement to create a self-regulating economic network was initiated by a coalition of 'de-growth' activists and local residents. This scheme included an alternative local currency, the 'Puma' (1 Puma = 1 Euro). De-growth activists saw the currency as a stepping stone to an alternative economic system; community activists from NADPP saw it as practical way to support collective action; and poor households saw it as a way to diversify income and reduce vulnerability and exclusion.

Members of the network have a personal account (publicly available) which shows exchanges of goods and services in Pumas. The value of this exchange is negotiated between members. Individuals are either in credit or debit to the community, not to individuals, and credit is interest free to encouraging trading. To accommodate the growth of the network and keep better track of the health of the currency, the process of managing exchange of credit and debit transitioned to the app Clickoin in 2017.

Starting with 20 participants who adopted the Puma, at least 800 people and over 50 businesses, such as bars and hairdressers, are now part of the Puma Social Currency Network, offering goods and services in exchange for Pumas. MercaPuma, a regularly occurring local market located in the plaza of Casa del Pumarejo offers another opportunity for the exchange of Pumas for local products. Anyone can join the Puma network and begin trading in Pumas by asking a member to be their 'godfather' or 'godmother' or by making contact with the organiser of a MercaPuma.

### Enabling Participation

The Puma was developed through a workshop where attendees acquired basic knowledge and skills to start the currency and began a process of mapping and linking local needs and available resources. At first, the Puma Social Currency Network was managed through a horizontal organisation structure based on a weekly general assembly, but as the currency grew in popularity, a decentralised structure was created with a steering group to make organisational and coordination decisions, and several autonomous and self-organised working groups to perform specific tasks based on their own targets.

The rapid scaling of the currency's use initially created managerial and coordination problems; undermining trust and solidarity elements. In response, the Puma Social Currency Network launched a period of 'hibernation', following which membership was restricted and new

internal rules introduced. Over time it has become more professionalised and more project- and goal-oriented – creating some tension with its initial flexible and spontaneous structure. Another critique is that an emphasis on members participating in organisational functions and transmitting the core values of the scheme has led to it becoming a more closed activist hub, reducing diversity and failing to engage a wider group of local residents in their everyday lives.

## Outcomes

The formation of the Puma Social Currency Network has created a system which maintains resources within a marginalised community by facilitating the support of local businesses and professionals. Casa del Pumarejo is owned by the government but continues to be managed by local residents who use the space to host a variety of community activities, such as MercaPuma and others centred around art, culture, politics, society and craftsmanship. More than a building or location, Casa del Pumarejo is a community of people who share a core set of values: community, trust and abundance.

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**Authors** Mariah Cannon, Jodie Thorpe, Silvia Emili

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Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE UK  
**T** +44 (0) 1273 606261 **E** [ids@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ids@ids.ac.uk) **W** [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)  
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